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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of a sample of supervising teachers of interns in regard to selected aspects of the internship experience and also in regard to their interns. A total of 267 elementary and secondary school teachers who had supervised a student teacher in Spring 1985 responded to a questionnaire about the interns and the internship experience. The 136 elementary school teachers and 131 secondary school teachers served as cooperating teachers through the program at the University of South Florida. About 70 percent of the teachers expressed the belief that their interns would be excellent teachers. Most frequently cited strengths included knowledge of subject matter, rapport and communication with students, lesson planning, and creativity. The most frequently cited area in need of improvement was classroom management. Supervising teachers who participated in a university program for training supervising teachers rated their interns even higher than non-participating teachers. (CB)

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The Clinical Teacher Perspective:
Examining the Field Experience with a
View to Plan for the Future

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ABSTRACT

The influence of the clinical (cooperating) teacher in the supervision of student teachers during the full-time internship is well documented. However, very little attention has been paid to the adequate preparation and selection of classroom teachers who serve as cooperating teachers and their perceptions and attitudes toward their interns and the internship process.

This report summarizes the perceptions of a sample of cooperating teachers on selected aspects of the internship experience and their interns. Similarities and differences in perceptions of teachers who had received special supervisory training and those of their colleagues who had not received such training are presented.

Introduction

A number of summaries of research findings have documented that the cooperating or classroom supervising teacher has significant influence on the behavior and attitude of student teachers. A comprehensive review by Pritchard (1974) looked at the variables in the cooperating teacher-student teacher relationship prior to and during internship. The findings from this review affirmed that the relationship between the cooperating teacher and student teacher is an extremely important one. There seemed, however, to be no agreement on which variables, personality factors or demographic factors, operated to cause the observable changes and the attitudes and behaviors of those being studied (Morrisey, 1980).

In a survey of secondary education student teachers Sadler (1974) found that student teachers relied more heavily on the cooperating teacher than on the university supervisor for assistance. This is consistent with the findings of Karmos and Jacko's (1977) study in which they report that teachers view their cooperating teachers as having the most significant influence on their student teaching experience. This influence apparently permeates both attitudinal and behavioral domains. A study by Yee (1969) concluded that student teachers shifted their attitudes to approximate more closely their cooperating teachers' attitudes. The findings of two other studies (Dunham, 1958 and Price, 1961) suggest that as the semester of full-time internship progresses the attitudes of student teachers merge toward those of their cooperating teachers. Johnson (1969) found that student teachers moved closer to the position of their cooperating teachers on the Rokeach's Dogmatism scale (Form E) by the end of the internship experience.

Other studies that have investigated the cooperating teacher's influence on the student teacher's actual teaching performance and behavior. In an observation study, Price (1961) found a statistically significant relationship between the performance of cooperating teachers and student teachers. These results suggest that student teachers do acquire many of the practices of the cooperating teachers. Zevin (1974) found that student teachers make significant movement toward the teaching model displayed by their cooperating teachers. Joyce and Seperson (1973) also found that student teachers adopt the teaching style of their cooperating teacher.

The supervising teacher was found also to be the primary influencing agent in the student teacher's use of questioning skills and classroom technical skills (Copeland, 1977; 1979). They were also found to have an influence on student's teachers' awareness of classroom teaching concerns (Hardy, 1977/1978; Nelson, 1977/1978) and maintenance of classroom control (Templin, 1979).

Although there is strong and consistent support in the literature for the belief that the cooperating or supervising teacher is the single most important agent in preservice teacher education, very little has been done to adequately prepare supervising teachers to perform their role.

It is clear from the literature that the attitudes and behaviors of the supervising teacher are extremely important in the development of attitudes and skills in the student teacher. The supervising teacher's perceptions of the student teacher, the value of the internship process, and his/her role in this most critical part of the formal preparation of the prospective teacher will have direct bearing on the outcomes of the internship for the intern. What we perceive, often becomes our reality. It is that reality that will shape and give direction to our actions and interactions with

others. In the case of the supervising teacher-intern partnership, it is that reality that is at work during the internship period.

Because the supervising teacher plays such a critical role in the field experience of the teacher-in-training, it is important that Colleges of Education conduct careful studies of the process. It is necessary to have a good understanding of supervising teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward the intern and the internship process and to provide training where necessary to those charged with the professional training of the teacher-candidate.

Such an approach is being taken by the College of Education at University of South Florida. The SunCoast Area Teacher Training (SCATT) program, a honors program for preservice teachers, has as one of its components a Clinical (Supervising) Teacher Training Program. Its purpose is to provide carefully selected classroom teachers with special training experiences that will help them develop and/or refine effective teaching, communication and supervisory skills. Teachers who receive this training will then serve as supervising (clinical) teachers for interns in the SCATT program.

Interns and supervising teachers receive complementary training experiences in effective teaching and communication skills. These training experiences are not limited to skill acquisition, but seek also to promote and instill in program participants a positive attitude toward teaching and the teaching profession. Thus, both interns and supervising teachers share a common language and a common perspective about the teaching profession and their respective roles in it.

The outcome of the clinical teacher training program is two-fold. The clinical teachers (1) incorporate these refined teaching and communication skills in their repertoire of teaching behaviors and consequently use them in their regular classroom teaching; and (2) model these behaviors for their interns, and observe and confer with them on their own teaching performance. The interns who are placed in the classrooms of these teachers will therefore have professional role models with whom they share a common language and common expectations. They will have a classroom ecological system in which they can effectively utilize the skills learned in the university classroom.

In this study we report the results of a recent survey of supervising teachers of interns from the elementary and secondary education programs at the University of South Florida. This survey was designed to obtain information about the teachers' perceptions of their interns and how they regard selected aspects of the internship experience. Comparisons were made between responses provided by a sample of teachers who participated in the SCATT Clinical Teacher Training Program (SCATT-trained) and a sample of their colleagues who had not received this training (non-SCATT).

Subjects and Procedures

The initial sample for this study consisted of 400 supervising teachers at the elementary and secondary high school levels in 14 counties served by the University of South Florida. Each of these teachers was a supervisor of an intern during the spring of 1985. Questionnaires were mailed to supervising teachers indicating the purpose of the study and requesting their participation. Completed questionnaires were received from 267 teachers, representing a 67% return rate. Thus, data from 267 teachers (136 elementary, and 131 secondary) were analyzed.

Table 1 presents a breakdown of the respondent sample by training experiences (SCATT-trained vs. non-SCATT) for supervising teachers and interns.

Table 1
Respondent Sample Breakdown by Training
(N=267)

Intern	Supervising Teacher		Total
	SCATT-Trained	Non-SCATT	
SCATT	26	32	58
Non-SCATT	23	186	209
Total	49	218	267

Results

Supervising teachers were asked questions regarding their perceptions of (a) the internship experience, and (b) their interns relative to their attitude and knowledge of subject matter, strengths and weaknesses, potential as future teachers and as colleagues. Respondents were also asked to list five to ten adjectives that they would use to describe their intern. Data are reported for the total group.

Perceptions of the Internship Experience

Value of the Internship

Seventy-four percent (74%) of the total sample of supervising teachers reported that having an intern was most definitely a good experience. A higher percentage of the SCATT-trained teachers rated the experience more positively than the Non-SCATT teachers (86% vs. 72%, respectively) and indicated that they would like to have another intern (94% vs. 82%, respectively). Supervising teachers' perceptions of the most beneficial aspects of having an intern are summarized in ten categories and presented in order of the frequency with which a given benefit (category) was cited:

- 1) Enables them to gain new ideas, see fresh approaches and teaching styles;
- 2) Provides them an opportunity to reevaluate/refine their own teaching methods and skills by observing those of the interns;
- 3) Provides them an opportunity to share ideas and techniques;
- 4) Allows them time to provide individual attention to their students;
- 5) Provides them an opportunity to assist and guide the intern and see the intern grow as a young professional;
- 6) Enables them to make a contribution to the profession;
- 7) Provides them with extra time for lesson preparation, organization, and/or free time to complete other responsibilities;
- 8) Provides them an opportunity to share current trends and research
- 9) Lets them see their students adapt to another teacher and a different teaching style;
- 10) No benefits.¹

¹ This category was reported by only 6 supervising teachers (i.e. about 2% of the respondents).

Sharing ideas and techniques was the benefit most often cited by the teachers who had received special supervisory training (SCATT Clinical Teachers). Also the SCATT-trained teachers cited their contribution to the profession and professional growth of the the intern (Categories 5 and 6) more frequently than the Non-SCATT supervising teachers.

Gaining new ideas, seeing fresh approaches and teaching styles, was the benefit most often cited by the teachers who had not received the special supervisory training (Non-SCATT).

A higher percentage of the Non-SCATT teachers when compared to SCATT-trained teachers, cited category 7--the availability of extra time for their own preparation and catching up on activities--as the most beneficial aspect of having an intern (12% vs. 6%, respectively).

Supervising Teachers' Perceptions of Interns

Perceptions as Professionals and Colleagues:

The majority of supervising teachers (70%) expressed the belief that their intern would be an excellent teacher. A significantly higher proportion of the SCATT-trained teachers, however, considered their intern would be an excellent teacher when compared to the non-SCATT teacher (88% vs 66%, respectively). Eighty-two percent (82%) of the teachers indicated that they would be happy to have the intern as a colleague and member of their faculty, while 79% were willing to have the intern as a teacher for their own children. Ninety-five percent (95%) indicated that they felt free to discuss teaching problems with the intern.

Supervising teachers were asked to rate their intern on 9 factors on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The mean rating of interns was very high (4.12 to 4.73 on the 5-point scale). Overall, supervising teachers regarded their interns to be knowledgeable in the subject matter they

taught, well prepared for classroom teaching, and able to explain the subject matter clearly. They were regarded as showing initiative, being highly creative, innovative and enthusiastic, and highly committed to teaching. SCATT-trained teachers were observed to give their interns higher ratings across all categories than Non-SCATT teachers. As is shown in Table 1 both sets of supervising teachers had academically talented interns (SCATT-interns) and non-SCATT interns. It is difficult to make any type of definitive statement as to why there were differences in the overall pattern of ratings between the two groups of teachers. It could be that the SCATT-trained teacher was able to more accurately assess these qualities in their interns and/or were better able to work with the intern during internship to produce a better product.

Perceived Strengths and Areas in Need of Improvement

Examination of interns' areas of strengths and those in need of improvement which were identified by supervising teachers seem to be fairly consistent across both groups of interns (SCATT and non-SCATT). Teachers cited strengths more often than areas in need of improvement. The most frequently cited strengths and areas in need of improvement are reported below in order of the frequency with which they were cited. Only those areas cited by 15% or more of the supervising teachers are presented.

Most frequently cited strengths:

- * Knowledge of the subject matter.
- * Rapport and communication with students
- * Lesson Planning
- * Creativity

Most frequently cited areas in need of improvement

- * Classroom management

Supervising teachers were asked to list five to ten adjectives that would be most descriptive of their intern. These responses were summarized in four broad areas: enthusiasm, personality characteristics, intelligence, professionalism. The most frequently cited descriptors are reported below.

Seventy percent (70%) of the teachers described their interns as intelligent. Not unexpectedly, this description was given for a higher proportion of SCATT-interns than non-SCATT interns (71% vs. 56%, respectively). About 60% of the teachers described their intern as accepting of others' ideas and feelings or as being caring. A higher proportion of the SCATT-interns were perceived in this manner than the non-SCATT interns (79% vs. 55%, respectively). Fifty percent of teachers perceived their intern as reliable. This was similarly reported for SCATT-interns and non-SCATT interns. Forty-three percent of the teachers described their interns as confident. A higher percentage of SCATT-interns was described in this manner than non-SCATT interns (67% vs. 51%, respectively).

In sum, a very large percentage of the supervising teachers who participated in the study perceived the internship experience and their role in it in a positive light. Many of the benefits that these teachers perceived that they derived from the experience related to their own professional growth and the professional contribution they were able to make in guiding and assisting the intern. Only about 2% of the respondents reported that they derived no benefits. Supervising teachers seemed genuinely accepting of the intern as a professional in-training. Almost all of them were willing to accept them as colleagues, and for the most part, regarded them highly in terms of their knowledge of subject matter, preparedness, sense of responsibility, commitment, and enthusiasm.

When given an opportunity to report on the intern's strengths and areas in need of improvement, supervising teachers cited areas of strengths much more frequently than areas in need of improvement. Interns' need for improvement in classroom management skills emerged very strongly for both the SCATT-interns (academically talented students) and the non-SCATT interns. This seems to be one performance domain which needs to be carefully addressed in our undergraduate program. Although this area is currently addressed in the SCATT Clinical Teacher Training Program, it is very evident that greater emphasis needs to be placed on ways in which the supervising teacher can help the intern improve his/her classroom management skills. The need for supervising professors to focus on this aspect of the intern's teaching performance is also evident. It is within a regular classroom context that the teacher-in-training will be best able to master this area.

Conclusion

We noted in the introduction that the cooperating (supervising) teacher is extremely important in the internship process. There are a variety of research studies which support the significance of that role as well as the nature of that role in improving the experience for students. The purpose of our study was to identify some ways in which supervising teachers perceive their interns and the internship experience and to consider the implications for program improvement. Our findings may add some additional information to the growing body of knowledge about supervising teachers, and how they can interface more productively in the process. This also may identify for us additional areas of study which can lead us in our attempt to further improve the process.

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